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STATE WILDLIFE AREA

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CONSERVATION

The Area

Iroquois County State Wildlife Area is situated in a low glacial outwash plain associated with the Kankakee River Valley that consists of marshland, sand ridges, and dunes. The initial acquisition of land occurred in 1944 for the purpose of protecting the declining prairie chicken population in the State. The prairie chickens did not survive and public hunting became the major use. The State purchased an additional 560 acres in 1984. Known as the Hooper Branch Savanna, 480 acres of this parcel is considered the largest single tract of rare native savanna remaining in Illinois. The total acreage is now 2,480.

The area is located 2 miles north and 3 miles east of Beaverville, in the extreme northeast corner of Iroquois County, about 80 miles south of Chicago. The majority of the area, 2,000 acres, is managed as a public hunting area. The remainder of the area is a dedicated nature preserve. Nonconsumptive recreation in the form of hiking and nature study is available when the facility is closed to hunting.

Natural Features

The Iroquois County State Wildlife Area exhibits some of the finest and most extensive prairie marsh and sand dune vegetation remaining in Illinois. The occurrence of this vegetation is regulated by soil characteristics and moisture. The dry sand ridges are dominated by black oak forest. Lower lying areas range from dry prairie to marsh, depending on soil moisture. Dominant grasses on dry prairie areas are little bluestem and switch grass. Grasses such as big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem, and switch grass are dominant on mesic (intermediate between wet and dry) prairie. Areas of wet prairie are indicated by bluejoint grass, cord grass, and sedges. Several boggy areas contain plants seldom encountered elsewhere in Illinois. Among these are blueberry, huckleberry, hardhack, march marigold, colic root, sundew (a carnivorous plant), and primrose violet.

Aside from supporting huntable populations of deer and upland game, Iroquois County State Wildlife Area is inhabited by numerous, interesting non-game birds and mammals. Wet prairies and marshes provide preferred habitat for birds such as herons, bitterns, rails, snipe, and marsh hawks. During migration, marshes are visited by numerous species of waterfowl and the rare sandhill crane. Mammals utilizing Iroquois' marshlands include raccoon, muskrat, mink, and beaver. Upland prairie and forest at Iroquois are inhabited by many species of songbirds. During migration the number of species that may be seen on the area is increased even further. The Veery, a rare thrush, is reported to nest on the area. Unusual mammalian species occupying the uplands include the plains pocket gopher and the southern flying squirrel.

Hooper Branch Savanna occupies the edge of former Glacial Lake Watseka. Fourteen thousand years ago this

lake formed between moraines damming up glacial melt-waters. The soils of Hooper Branch Savanna are sandy, having derived from beach and nearshore sand deposits of Lake Watseka. Lake Watseka was drained after the morainal dams were breached leaving the sand deposits exposed to wind action. A dune and swale topography developed which is quite noticeable today.

Savanna developed on the dry dune ridges while shrub prairies and mesic sand prairies developed in the wetter swales. Savannas are composed of a mix of trees with prairie grasses and forbs. Savannas have a park-like appearance with widely spaced trees and little brush. Savannas are a fire maintained natural community. Periodic fires swept through this area prior to settlement killing small trees and shrubs but the thick bark of the large trees protected them from the fire. Black oaks are the dominant savanna trees at Hooper Branch Savanna with prairie grasses such as porcupine grass, june grass, and little bluestem. Prairie forbs such as puccoons, lupines, lead-plant, spiderwort, and butterfly weed provide color to the savanna landscape. In the shrub prairie portions, mosses carpet the sand surface.

Facilities

Picknicking: There are many designated picnic areas with tables and grills located in shady areas convenient to parking lots. Sanitary facilities are available in most areas. There are no shelters. Drinking water is available at the area headquarters.

Hiking: There is a ¾ mile long hiking trail and a one mile self-guided nature trail of which 1/3 mile is accessible to the handicapped. In addition, several miles of unmarked trails wind through wooded and prairie sections of the area that have much interesting plant, animal, and bird life. To preserve the high quality of the natural area at Iroquois, all access on the area is by walking only. Please carry out all litter and do not remove any natural material.

Archery: In the northwest corner of the area, an archery range is available for area visitors.

Hand Trap Range: A designated shooting area is available for anyone wishing to warm up for the hunting season: shotgun only. Open daily except during November and December.

Dog Training: There is a designated area for training or exercising dogs. Training is closed April 1 to August 1 for the protection of breeding wildlife.

Concession: A seasonal concession operates at the headquarters during the hunting season.

Winter Activities: Snowmobilers are permitted to use 12 miles of signed trails that follow the fire control lanes and service road from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.



Hunting

The area is operated primarily as a permit pheasant hunting area; however, there is rabbit, quail, and pheasant hunting on the area after the permit season has been concluded. Prior to the permit portion of the hunting season, squirrel and dove provide the early hunting action. Deer hunting (bow only) is allowed on the area prior to and following the permit portion of the hunting season. Lesser opportunities for woodcock, rail, snipe, and deer (shotgun) are also available. Check with the site superintendent for upland game species and hunting dates on the area.

1. During the permit pheasant season, all hunters must check in and check out, before and after hunting, at the area headquarters.
2. Before and after the permit pheasant season, all hunters must check out at the area headquarters after hunting.
3. Raccoon and opossum may be taken only with a special permit issued from the site superintendent.

General Information

For further details about this site, contact Site Superintendent, Iroquois County State Wildlife Area, Beaverville, Illinois 60912, phone 815/435-2218.

For information on other sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, Illinois 62706.

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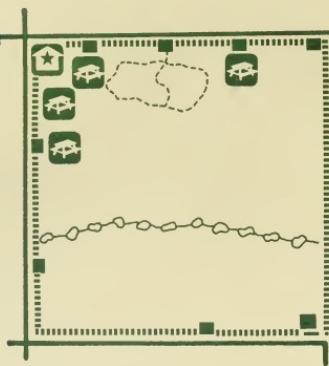
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To Route 1



- Area Boundary
- Parking
- Headquarters & Concession
- Trail
- Dog Training Area
- Road
- Picnic Tables
- Pond



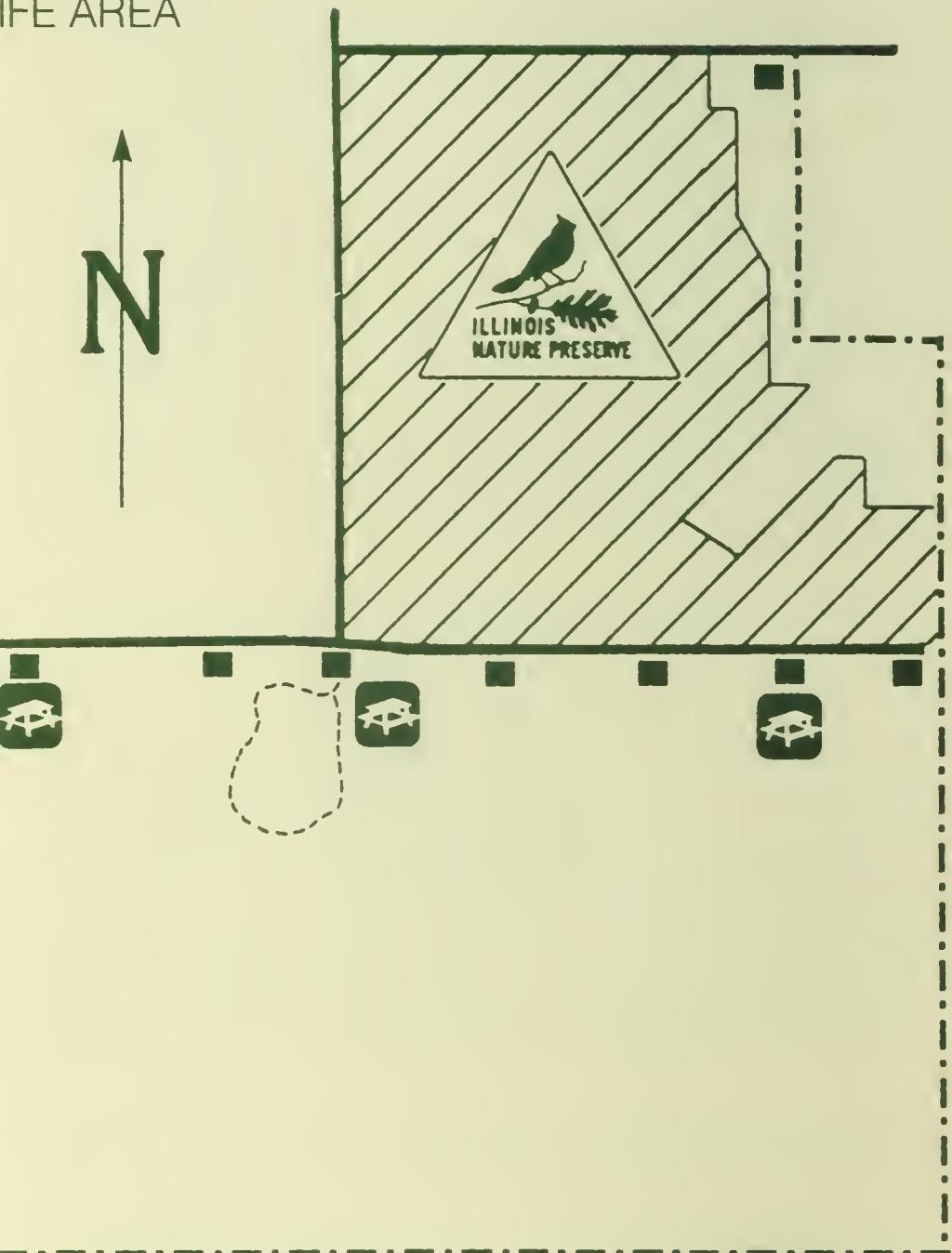
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